He Did Not Want to Go

Biography notes of St. Patrick of Ireland

Lent | TBC | March 15, 2026

Introduction:

- A large part of this biography came from the book *"People Whose Faith Got Them into Trouble"*
- Real name – Magnus Subarus Patricius – born in Britain - (387AD-March 17, 461AD)
- Known as the Bishop Confessor – Apostle of Ireland
- Traveled to Ireland twice and neither time did he choose to go
- First time – because of Irish pirates and second time because of God

From the beginning:

- Great turmoil in Europe and the empire was crumbling
- The Roman legions controlled Britain for about 470 years thru Roman law, infiltrating the living standards and customs
- In 385 AD the Huns and the Goths as well as other empires began to take control forcing Rome to withdraw troops and leaving the British citizens to fend for themselves.
- Once the last group sailed away in AD 400 different groups swooped in to take over with the Irish being one of those who ravaged the towns and estates.
- Irish pirates began to raid and attack these areas. Patrick's father was a deacon in the Christian church and a minor member of the nobility with ownership of a villa that was vulnerable to the pirates.
- Patrick was 16 when the pirates came to their home and threw nets over them. Patrick's family escaped but Patrick's and many of their servants were captured and thrown into the pirate boat sailing to Ireland.
- He was sold to a Druid tribal chieftain and put to work herding pigs for 6 years.
- He went from noblemen's heir to pig herder overnight.
- No chance for education, friends, possessions, family or name- he lost it all.
- He was so lonely and desperately he fell back on his Christian teachings and was converted to following Christ.
- From then on, he spent much time in the presence of the Lord and eventually came to understand that his slavery was a gift from God and his captivity was provided so that he had the opportunity to know God.
- He prayed at work or when he walked probably more than a hundred times a day. His devotion led to his nickname "Holy Boy" among fellow slaves.
- One night in a dream he heard a voice say "Wake up. Your ship is waiting for you."
- He woke up and walked 200 miles to find a ship preparing to sail. Even though the captain refused to take him but a crew member called him back got him onboard. He arrived back in Britain at the brink of starvation.
- He was 22 now and not a lot was known at this point but it is thought that at this time he studied and entered the priesthood.
- He had no plans to return to Ireland until he had another dream (the man needs to stay awake! Or take a Tylenol PM) that Patrick saw the letter labeled "the voice of the Irish". When he read this he heard the people back where he was a slave saying "Holy Boy we beg you, come walk among us again." He woke knowing he had to go back.

Return to Ireland:

- Three obstacles –
    - His family-they wanted him to stay home
    - The clergy – didn't think the Irish were worth saving
    - Finances – because he wanted to pay his own way

- He loved his family and felt great pain leaving them again saying "leaving my home and family was a costly price to pay; but . . . I received a more valuable thing: the gift of knowing and loving God."
- He wanted to pay his own way because he didn't want to take what belonged to other people – some women even wanted to give him their jewelry to sell but he didn't want to take anything that would be a possible stumbling block that unbelievers could possibly criticize.
- He got the money by selling his nobility and used his inheritance to buy a boat in 432 he began the trip back to Ireland
- He was sent to Ireland designated by the pope from his home as a missionary.
- He and his crew landed in Inver Dea to people throwing rocks at them so they left and sailed along the coast of Ireland intermittently landing and preaching the to farmers and families who were on the beaches.
- His lack of education bothered Patrick all his life but he believed that his enemies were worth saving so he needed to persevere in spite of this insecurity
- He continued to move around and each place he preached and shared the gospel. As a result Christianity became more established and eventually many of Ireland's laws were changed to conform with Christian beliefs and morality.
- Patrick even went to his former owner that enslaved him and shared Christ with him. The man was still so ingrained in his heathen gods that he locked himself in his home and set it on fire. He cremated himself and all his possessions.
- Patrick traveled in a chariot over the Irish land and preached social reform and education. He opened schools and many converts learned to read and write as well as learn a new alphabet.
- Patrick believed in educating those who believed so they could learn how to read the scripture.

Religious Druid wizards confrontation:

- Remember the Druids were the ones who enslaved him. They guarded the secret of writing and didn't want the people to be educated.
- Religion of the druids was entrenched in Ireland and they worshipped spirits who were in the stones, trees, storm and sun. They claimed to control the weather so were very aware of all celestial changes.
- On Easter in 433 Patrick challenged the wizards by intentionally setting a fire at the same time the Druids were calling the people to worship the great stones at a huge bonfire. Patrick intentionally set his fire across the way (so the Druids could see it) to commemorate Christ, the Light of the World
- When they confronted him, Patrick preached about the incarnation and Christ's resurrection. Some believed and some didn't and although many stories have come from these events, it is thought that thru this encounter with the Druids that night, this was pivotal in launching Patrick's reputation, and he became a national figure in the country because of this act and his courage to confront these wicked tribe of people.

Patick was always motivated by loving gratitude:

- Patrick believed he was living in the last day before Christ's return.
- He felt responsible and motivated to "preach the Gospel to the edge of the earth beyond which no man lives."
- He challenged heathenism wherever he found it. He went across the country and preached to slaves bringing hope and comfort to men at the racetracks in the midst of gambling and drinking.
- He not only preached but ministered to the whole person which raised the standard of life for the Irish.
- He felt that in seeing injustices there needed to be a call for repentance as well. He felt strongly that he needed to not just preach but live his message in action. In fact . . .
    - He paid judges' salaries out of his own pocket so that they would not be rewarded from the person who won the suit which helped to clean up the judicial system.
- He established monasteries to encourage centers of learning

- He had a big heart toward those in slavery (knowing what it was like first handed) especially the women who were ostracized and treated horribly by their masters
- He was targeted by many thru efforts to kill him from poisoning to a warrior spearing his chariot driver thinking it was Patrick they were killing. He said "Everyday I expect to be murdered or robbed or enslaved; but I'm not afraid of these things because of how promises of Heaven."
- Because of these beliefs, he faced opposition within the church as well. The church authorities questioned his fitness to be a bishop and it is thought that he may have been suspended for a time (the records are not totally clear)
- However through this crisis in his life, it prompted him to write **Confessions** which included hymns and what is thought to be the only surviving records of his life and thoughts.

Legends associated with Patrick:

- The shamrock
    - Legend credits Patrick with teaching the Irish about the doctrine of the Holy Trinity by showing people the shamrock, a three-leafed plant, using it to illustrate the Christian teaching of three persons in one God.
    - In pagan Ireland, three was a significant number and the Irish had many triple deities, a fact that may have aided Patrick in his evangelisation efforts when he "held up a shamrock and discoursed on the Christian Trinity."
- Patrick was credited in banishing the snakes out of Ireland by chasing them to sea after they attacked him during his fast on a mountain.
    - Ireland was well known to be a land without snakes, and this was noted as early as the third century by Gaius Julius Solinus, but later legend credited Patrick with banishing snakes from the island. The earliest text to mention an Irish saint banishing snakes from Ireland is in fact the Life of Saint Columba(chapter 3.23), written in the late seventh or early eighth century. Post-glacial Ireland never had snakes. "At no time has there ever been any suggestion of snakes in Ireland, so [there was] nothing for St. Patrick to banish", says naturalist Nigel Monaghan.
- **St. Patrick's Day** was considered his feast day, is observed on 17 March, the supposed date of his death. It is celebrated in Ireland and among the Irish as a religious and cultural holiday. In the Catholic Church in Ireland, it is both a solemnity and a holy day of obligation.

In conclusion, we read in his book **Confessions** he says " I **am Patrick, a sinner, a most uncultivated and least of all the faithful"**.

- This highlights his humility, which was central to his identity and faith, as he frequently attributed his strength and missionary success in Ireland to divine grace rather than personal merit.
- He left us with many personal accounts of how he lived out his faith and especially the importance of what it means to deny yourself as one lives for Jesus. It is thought that his most famous blessing is "*Christ in me"* which Shawn will be leading us in at the conclusion of our time tonight, but I want to leave you with another blessing that was attributed to coming from Patrick himself:

"I arise today through
God's strength to pilot me,
God's might to uphold me,
God's wisdom to guide me,
God's eye to look before me,
God's ear to hear me,
God's word to speak for me,
God's hand to guard me."

May the life of St. Patrick and these words be with us in a special way this week
as we learn again what Jesus' invitation to deny ourselves looks like for each of us each day.